

History of Hamamelis (Witch Hazel), Extract and Distillate



By John Uri Lloyd and John Thomas Lloyd

HISTORY OF HAMAMELIS (WITCH HAZEL),*¹ EXTRACT AND DISTILLATE.

BY JOHN URI LLOYD AND JOHN THOMAS LLOYD.²

In 1865, the senior member of the writers of this treatise was acting as clerk in the establishment of W. J. M. Gordon and Brother, Ninth and Central Avenues, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Mr. Gordon specialized in physicians' supplies, and made a feature of the "Concentrations" and other Eclectic preparations, then rapidly coming into favor. This was natural, as the Gordon establishment was but two blocks from the Eclectic Medical Institute, Court and Plum Streets. Drs. King and Scudder, and other professors of the Institute, were patrons of the Gordon establishment, and contributed, constantly and helpfully, to Mr. Gordon's pharmaceutical researches. They naturally fraternized with the physicians of other schools, who met in Gordon's large, comfortable and hospitable front room, where all, alike, considered themselves at home. A "No Man's Land" it was, but one of cheer and helpfulness, not of war, personalities and misrepresentation. The physicians who there met, differed in views, but they personally respected each other's ideals and processes. They had no desire to suppress the efforts of others who were endeavoring to serve the needs of the American people. That was left to medical politicians.

At that time, 1865, Mr. Gordon had in his employ a business representative named Leon Hurtt, a brother of F. W. Hurtt, a banker in New York City. Through Leon, F. W. Hurtt proposed to purchase the right to make the preparation then known as "Pond's Extract." The senior writer of this chronicle well remembers when, in his presence, Leon Hurtt informed Mr. Gordon (who, I was told, had declined to purchase the Pond Extract rights) that he wished to resign his position with the Gordons, to devote his time to the introduction and sale of the proprietary medicine, "Pond's Extract;" it was then used almost exclusively by the Homeopathic medical profession of America, being scarcely known either to other physicians, or to the public generally.

In one of my visits (J. U. L.) to Los Angeles, California, I learned that Leon T. Hurtt was yet living, a resident of that city. I located his home, and in 1915 made him a personal visit, with the object of obtaining from him an authoritative statement concerning the history of Pond's Extract, as well as his connection therewith. In this and other later visits, he gave me in detail the history of the preparation, which was first a water-made extract, but is not now an "extract," although established and sometimes sold under that title. I have not hesitated to utilize Mr. Hurtt's words verbatim, as a part of this paper.

*Section on Historical Pharmacy, Toronto meeting, 1932.

¹ Especially as related to the distillate, known first under the name "Golden Treasure," then as "Pond's Extract," and next as "Aqua Hamamelidis" (U. S. P. IX) and "Fluid Extract of Hamamelis" (N. F. V).

² The illustrations presented in this treatise, unless otherwise credited, are by John Thomas Lloyd. The Hamamelis shrub was photographed by him in the New York location where the Oneida Indians lived, and the experimental supplies mentioned in this article were obtained by him from the Oneida section.

To the foregoing I will add that in my opinion the story herein told could not, at the date of my interview with Mr. Hurtt, have been handled authoritatively by any other person, he being the only living “charter member” of the organization originally known as the “Pond’s Extract Company.”

Pond’s distilled hamamelis was quietly introduced into the Homeopathic school of medicine. Coming gradually into the practice of Eclectic physicians, creeping into that of Allopathic physicians, it finally came into the use of the public generally. The chemist, finding little in the distillate other than alcohol and traces of an essential oil, accepted that distilled hamamelis must, if it had any virtues, depend on the water and the alcohol it contained.

And yet, after many decades have passed, distilled hamamelis stands firmly entrenched as one of the most popular of physicians’ favorites, being also largely employed as a toilet application in America. And that, too, in the face of resistance by authority such as Dr. John Marshall, and H. C. Wood, of Philadelphia who, in 1886, made a strenuous scientific laboratory investigation of hamamelis, deciding that there was nothing of therapeutic value in the distillate. Their article ended as follows:

“This much used, and still more lauded witch-hazel, or the so-called distillate of witch hazel, must depend for its virtues upon the alcohol they contain, and the faith they inspire.” This view is upheld by the *United States* and the *National Dispensatories*, as follows:

“As whatever slight therapeutic virtues witch-hazel possesses seems to depend on its tannin, it is obvious that this distillate cannot represent the drug.”
U. S. Dispensatory.

“The good that it exerts in the treatment of sprains, bruises, wounds, chilblains, sore eyes, headache, and a host of other conditions, resides more in the activity of a cleansing and evaporating lotion and in the mind of its user, than in any decided curative properties that the preparation may possess.”
National Dispensatory, 1916.

In this connection, I am of the opinion that no claim is made by any maker of the distillate that it represents the fixed astringent principles of the drug. Nor am I convinced that alcohol is the only serviceable content of the distillate.

“Golden Treasure”

As written by Leon T. Hurtt, of the Pond’s Extract Company.

(Edited slightly in phrase directions L.)

In the early 1840’s, Theron T. Pond, a resident of Utica, New York, became interested in, and associated more—or less, with a tribe of Indians known as the Oneida tribe then located in Central New York. He found that they were using for burns, boils and wounds of every description a ‘tea’ made by their Medicine Man from a species of bush known as ‘witch hazel,’ a shrub supposed by them to grow only in Central New York. The Medicine Man made his extract by steeping the shrub in an ordinary teakettle. The liquid which he obtained was colored but as clear as water, and had a peculiar aroma obtained from no other shrub.

The 'Witch Hazel' is peculiar (Cuts B & C), in that it blossoms in the fall, producing small, yellow flowers. The medicinal properties of the extract were, in the opinion of the Oneidas, remarkable. A sudden electrical and thunder storm (it was stated) would turn the liquid milky, but within forty-eight to seventy hours it would return to its original clearness. (This needs corroboration. J. U. L.)

Mr. Pond, believing in the wonderful medicinal properties of the 'Witch Hazel' tea, decided to learn from the Indian doctor the peculiar species of shrub used. With the Indian Medicine Man he spent several months, searching the underbrush until he fully informed himself of the shrub they employed. He then formed with the Indians a sort of partnership to make the extract, putting it up in a shape to be sold among their friends.

The Medicine Man was extremely particular about the species of shrub used, and its manipulation. He would gather it himself in the woods, bringing it in by the armful, and steeping it at once.

At first they boiled the shrub in an ordinary iron kettle or cauldron, over a direct fire. Thus they produced a fair article, but they could not preserve it. After studying different preservatives, they finally used about 3% alcohol, but in warm weather that amount of alcohol failed to keep the product, and the alcohol was increased.

They decided to give to their extract the trade name, '*Golden Treasure*,' a name suggested by Mr. Pond. After his death, this name was changed to 'Pond's Extract.'

Mr. Pond and the Medicine Man worked together for several years, introducing the product mainly among their personal friends. They finally decided to put the 'Extract' on the market, and did so, in a local way, in 1848. When we sold the Pond's Extract Company, in 1898, there was in the company's safe a two-ounce bottle, made in 1848, which was apparently still good. Whether that bottle can now be found, I do not know.

Theron T. Pond died some time between 1847 and 1850. It is said that he lost his life from exposure in the woods.

Between 1846 and 1850, Pond and the Indian Medicine Man sold their business to Hart and Munson, iron foundry men of Utica, New York. They took in with them Isaiah A. Palmer, a friend and neighbor of Theron T. Pond. The business was next sold to a firm in New York whose name I have forgotten, but as no business of any consequence resulted, the company was sold by the sheriff. It was bought in by Isaiah A. Palmer, who claimed never to have sold his interest therein. It should here be repeated that Palmer, Hart and Munson had given the product the name 'Pond's Extract,' dropping the name 'Golden Treasure.'



Fig.A—Indian medicine man

Dr. Frederick Humphrey, a Methodist minister, and also a Homeopathic physician, proprietor of the Homeopathic Medicine Company, 562 Broadway, New York, claimed that for years he had been Mr. Pond's family physician, and that Pond had given him the right to manufacture and sell the extract through his 'Humphrey Homeopathic Medicine Company.' He did, indeed, commence to manufacture the same, continuing the name, 'Pond's Extract.' His claim was denied by Palmer, who commenced suit and applied for an injunction forbidding Humphrey from either using the name 'Pond's Extract,' or manufacturing the article.

A party from Connecticut who had worked for the original firm of Pond and the Indian, also claimed that he had the right to make 'Golden Treasure,' but he was unable to establish his claim.

At that time, the 'extract' was still made by using the old cauldron, over a direct fire. Palmer employed a copper kettle, with a very crude concentrating hood and worm. Cold water was used for condensing the vapor.

In 1871 or '72, while the lawsuit (Palmer vs. Humphrey) was still pending, Mr. F. W. Hurtt, a banker of New York, bought the interest, or the alleged interest, of the Humphrey Homeopathic Medicine Company, and to quiet Palmer, took him into partnership, giving him an eighth interest in the new corporation, which was capitalized at \$100,000. At that time, the sale of Pond's Extract was less than \$5000 per annum.

Harry Cole, of Cincinnati, myself and F. W. Hurtt, of New York, bought the concern, which we reorganized, electing F. W. Hurtt, *President*, L. H. Hurtt, *Vice-President*, Harry Cole, *Treasurer*, and I. A. Palmer, *Manufacturer*. We transferred the company from 562 Broadway, New York, to 76 Williams Street, New York, the firm name now being, F. W. Hurtt and Brother, Wholesale Druggists. The company then had three factories, small and crude, with four kettles at each factory. One of these factories (all in New York State), was located at Tightsville, one at Little Falls, and one at Frankfort. These three factories I consolidated into one, at Rome, New York, and for four years ran that factory from November, each year, until April or May.

In the meantime Isaiah A. Palmer had died, and E. D. Palmer, the sculptor, became interested with us. However, besides holding the office of vice-president and running the drug department after I. A. Palmer's death, I added to my other duties the manufacturing of the Extract.

We then moved from Rome, New York, to Chester, Connecticut, the only other locality I knew where the Indian species of Witch Hazel was obtainable.¹ I immediately decided to build steam stills,² believing that I could obtain better extract from the shrub than I could with the old-time, direct fire, copper kettles. This I proved by making an extract nineteen per cent stronger than we had before obtained.

About a year after our purchase of their alleged interest from Dr. Humphrey and the Homeopathic Company, Humphrey's Medicine Company sued us for reformation of contract and agreement. We in turn enjoined them from using the term 'Pond's Extract,' or from manufacturing that product. This lawsuit was in the court for several years.

The day after our charter was issued by the Secretary of State, our president, F. W. Hurtt, started on a trip around the world. It then became my duty

¹ For years I made distilled hamamelis from a grove of witch-hazel shrubs on the Licking River, Kentucky. J. U. L.

² The original "extract" abandoned. J. U. L.

to assume the entire responsibility of the company. We ran the Extract in connection with our wholesale drug business (F. W. Hurtt & Brother), but the establishment was inadequate for both the drug and medicine, and the Pond's Extract business. We therefore leased a whole building at 98 Maiden Lane, and there we conducted the business for five years, until 1878. On our president's return, and on account of the rapid increase of business, we bought a brick factory in Brooklyn, E. D., a four-story building one hundred feet square. This was used only for bottling and shipping, and for the Business and Advertising Departments of the Pond's Extract Company. Our distilleries were still in Chester, Connecticut.



Fig.B—Witch-hazel flowers



Fig.C—Witch-hazel twig showing leaves and fruit

When the bridge crossing East River was built, the site of our building in Brooklyn was needed, and F. W. Hurtt bought the old Belmont home, 76 Fifth Avenue, New York, and No. 1, West 13th Street. This we remodeled, moving into it in 1883. As stated, we were then manufacturing our Extract at Chester, Connecticut. There we abandoned the old kettle previously employed, changing to 400-gallon copper stills made under my own supervision. I understand that the same stills are in use by the Pond Extract Company, at the present time. With our new stills, I added about twenty-two and one-half percent to the strength of the extract.

There seems to be only two or three sections of the United States where the true species of Witch Hazel grows, of the quality employed by the Pond Company and the Indian 'Medicine Man' of the Oneidas, namely, Central New York and Connecticut. I am told that each year the tribes of Indians on the plains send their Medicine Man East, for their supply of what they term 'Witch Hazel Bush.'

In 1884, our president, F. W. Hurtt, passed away, and I was elected President of the Company, remaining in that position until I resigned, in 1898. At that time our business was about half a million dollars each year.

In 1882 I added several new preparations, consisting of toilet cream,

dentifrice, lip salve, ointment, porous plasters, catarrh remedy and toilet soap. Special machinery for their manufacture was erected in our laboratory at Number 1 West 13th Street, that building being connected with the one containing our offices, at 76 Fifth Avenue. All the articles above mentioned were made from the product of Pond's Extract, in different forms, and proved very successful with a large trade.

In 1878 we had opened a branch on Great Russell Street, London, opposite Bridges Museum, and there built up a reasonable trade, principally on Pond's Extract. We also established an agency with Roberts and Co., of Paris, France. We exhibited our preparations at the Paris Exposition, and received a medal. The date of that Exposition I have forgotten, and have no data by which I can recall it. I think the present Pond's Extract Company retains the London Branch, at the present day.

While in London, I made a contract with the Hotel Syndicate that controlled all the first class hotels in London. The contract was as follows: The Syndicate to buy from the London Company ten gross of Pond's Extract, of the small size, and pay our regular wholesale price for it. They were to place a bottle in each guest's room, charging same to the room. When occupied by a guest, it was the duty of the chambermaid to report to the office whether or not the guest had used the bottle. If so, it was charged to the guest, and another bottle immediately put in its place. We were to place in the 'lifts' of each hotel a large mirror with the words 'Pond's Extract' lettered across its top. Other mirrors were to be placed in the reception room and the public rooms on the first floor. This would have required an expenditure of ten or eleven thousand dollars. For this privilege, for one year, we were to pay the Hotel Syndicate One Thousand Dollars. However, the Board of Directors of my company refused to sanction my agreement, and the contract was not consummated.